zebras even at moderate distances, although there was nothing to hide them, the black and white stripes blending so completely that the animals assume a dull brown appearance quite in harmony with the general colour of the locality in which they are found, and in which, for instance, Rooi Rehbok (*Pelea capreolata*) is also well protected on account of its peculiar brownish coat. A member of our party, who on another occasion gave proof that he is possessed of excellent eyesight, and who has frequently hunted in similar localities, saw a zebra which was wounded in one of the front legs at a distance of about 400 yards, and strange to say he mistook it for a big baboon. In a letter which I received from him a few days ago, he said, "It galloped like a baboon from me, and I could only see that the colour was greyish-brown. At about 500 yards from me it ran on to a little krantz, and mounting the highest rock, drew its body together just as a baboon does when its four feet are all together on the summit of a little rock." His remark as to the greyish-brown colour of the animal is the more valuable, as I believe this gentleman, Mr. Wrench, A.R.M. of Cradock, is quite unprejudiced. In my own letter to him, which drew forth these remarks, I had only asked him for the distance at which he saw the zebra, and I did not ask him how it was that he mistook a black and white zebra for a brown baboon on a perfectly clear South African day. My own observations also confirm that the stripes of the zebra are of protective value. Riding along a slope I suddenly saw four zebras within 100 yards above me. They were galloping down the hill, but stopped when they caught sight of me. As soon as they stopped I saw their stripes pretty distinctly. After I had fired and wounded one of them, they started again galloping down the hill round me in a semicircle at a distance of about 70 yards. All this time they presented a dull brown appearance, no stripes being visible, although I had my attention fixed on this point. They disappeared beyond a ridge, went down a little valley, and I heard afterwards that they ascended the next slope, which was not more than 1500 yards away from where I stood with a native servant. Yet even this lynx-eyed native could not see them going up this slope. They had vanished from us.

Perhaps it may interest some of your readers that zebras are still fairly plentiful on the rugged hills west of Cradock. A troop of forty-one individuals was seen, on the very ground over which we hunted, a short time before we arrived. Our party saw eleven in two days, but I believe three were seen on two if not on three different occasions. This would reduce their number to eight, if not to five. They are protected by Government, and also by the farmers themselves, but I am afraid that in spite of that their days are numbered. They are said to be very destructive to wire fences, and as the inclosing of farms with wire fences is steadily on the increase in this colony, many a farmer will have, though perhaps reluctantly and in defiance of the law, to take up his gun and clear them off his property. There will then probably be an outcry by people who know the difficulties of South African farming only from books written by travellers who hurry through South Africa in a first-class railway carriage; but those who really know South Africa well will say it is a great, great pity, but it cannot be helped, unless Government provides speedily an abode for these and other animals threatened with extinction. The first step in the right direction would perhaps be the establishment of a Government Zoological Garden, but I hope others who are more competent than I am will stir the people of Cape Colony up before it is too late, so that something more than mere game-laws may be done to preserve them.

S. SCHÖNLAND.

Albany Museum, Grahamstown.

The Protective Device of an Annelid.

IN September last I forwarded to NATURE the description of an effectual protective device adopted by a small tubicolous Annelid which had been sent to me from Jersey; the device consisting in the coiling-up of the end of the tube. I have recently been able to submit specimens to Prof. W. C. McIntosh, of St. Andrews, who has kindly identified the builder as *Sabella saxicava*, a form which he tells me is common in the Channel Islands, and occurs also on our southern coast. So far as I can learn, this peculiar and interesting habit of an Annelid had not previously been observed.

ARNOLD T. WATSON.

Sheffield, May 1892.

The General Circulation of the Atmosphere.

IN that excellent lecture by Dr. Pernter, delivered before the Scientific Club at Vienna, published by you in NATURE (vol. xlv. p. 593), the theory of the trade winds being occasioned by the rising of the rarefied air at the equator causing an upward current, while cold air from north and south flows in to supply its place, coupled with the earth's rotation to the east, is attributed to Dr. Dove. "Dove was the first person . . ." But that theory will be found distinctly enunciated by Sir John Herschel in his "Treatise on Astronomy" (1833), where he attributes it to Captain Basil Hall, "where this is distinctly, and, as far as I am aware, for the first time reasoned out." Herschel was not aware that it had been distinctly reasoned out by George Hadley, F.R.S., in the thirty-ninth volume of the Philosophical Transactions, a century before Basil Hall.

J. CARRICK MOORE.

THE SURFACE-FILM OF WATER, AND ITS RELATION TO THE LIFE OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS.[1]

IT is necessary to the exposition of my subject that I should begin by reminding you of some well-known properties of the surface of water. These are familiar to every student of physics, and are set forth in many elementary books. They are well explained and illustrated, for instance, in Prof. Boys's deservedly popular book on "Soap-bubbles." But there may be some persons here who have not quite recently given their thoughts to this subject, and it will only cost us a few minutes to repeat a few simple experiments, which will establish some fundamental facts relating to the surface-film of water.

The following experiments were then shown:—

(1) Mensbrugghe's float. Proves that the surface-film of water offers resistance to the passage of a solid body from beneath.

(2) Aluminium wire made to float on water. Proves that the surface-film of water offers resistance to the passage of a solid body from above. The resistance is proportional to the length of the line of contact of the solid with the water.

(3) Copper gauze made to float on water. Here, a number of intersecting wires are employed instead of a single wire, and the consequent increase in the length of the line of contact greatly increases the weight which can be supported.

(4) Frame with vertical threads, carrying a light plate of brass. The threads hang vertically at first, but when the whole is dipped into soapy water, the adhering film exerts a pull upon the sides of the frame, draws the threads into regular curves, and raises the brass plate. When the film is broken, the threads resume their previous vertical position, and the plate falls.

(5) Aluminium wire supported by vertical copper wires. Each end of the aluminium wire forms a loop, which fits loosely to one of the copper wires. When the apparatus is dipped into soapy water, the contraction of the film draws the aluminium wire upwards. After pulling it down with a thread, the wire can be again drawn up. This is another illustration of the tendency of the film to contract. We use soapy water, because the film lasts for a considerable time, but the surface-film of pure water, though less viscous than that of soapy water, is even more contractile. We have already seen that the surface-film clings with considerable tenacity to any solid body introduced into it, and that its hold increases with the length of the line of contact. It is for this reason that fine meshes offer so great a resistance to the passage of the surface-film. Air can pass through the meshes with perfect ease; water also, if not at the surface, can pass through readily enough, but the surface-film in contact with air will only pass through with

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[1] Lecture given at the Royal Institution, March 4, 1892, by L. C. Miall, Professor of Biology at the Yorkshire College, Leeds. Some passages were omitted in delivery, for want of time.

difficulty, and if there is water behind it, the water may thus be restrained from passing through the meshes.

(6) Muslin bag hung in front of the lantern. Water poured into the bag (a large spoonful) does not flow out; but when the muslin beneath the water is rubbed with a rod, it becomes wetted, the surface-film passes to the outside of the bag, and the water trickles through.

There are many plants which take advantage of this property of the surface-film of water, viz. that it will not penetrate small spaces, in order to keep themselves dry. You must have observed how the hairy grasses repel water. The surface-film is unable to pass into the fine space between the hairs, and accordingly the water above the surface-film is kept from contact with the leaf. This simple artifice is often employed by plants which float at the surface of water. Here it is important that they should keep dry, not only for the purpose of respiration, but for another reason too. They commonly have great power of righting themselves when accidentally submerged, and this self-righting property depends upon the fact that the under surface of each leaf is always wet, while the upper surface is incapable of being wetted. The microscopic hairs which thickly cover the upper surface are sufficient to exclude the water. A leaf of Pistia is now submerged, and shown as an opaque object in the lantern. You see by the gleaming of its surface that it is overspread by a continuous flat bubble of air, which looks like quicksilver beneath the water. I will next invert a leaf of Pistia by means of a rotating lever. It is now brought up beneath the surface of the water in an inverted position, and you see that, notwithstanding its buoyancy, it is unable to free itself and rise to the surface, because of the air-bubble, which adheres both to the leaf and to the disk at the end of the lever, and ties both together. Complete separation of the leaf from the disk would involve the division of the air-bubble into two smaller bubbles, one adhering to the leaf and the other to the disk. In this operation the surface-film would necessarily be extended directly in opposition to its natural tendency to contract. Several other water-plants exhibit the same properties as Pistia. I will mention two of the water-ferns—Salvinia and Azolla. Salvinia is found floating on still water in the warmer parts of Europe, as well as in other quarters of the globe. The leaves are attached on opposite sides of a horizontal stem. Long hairy roots (or what look like roots, and really answer the same purpose) hang down into the water. Salvinia has in a remarkable degree the power of rising when submerged, of always rising with its leaves up and its roots down, and of rising with the upper surface of its leaves perfectly dry. It is obvious that these qualities are most useful to a plant which may be pressed under water or drenched with rain. Its nutrition, like that of all green plants, depends largely upon substances extracted from the air; and to be overspread with water, which disappeared only by a slow process of evaporation, would be disadvantageous, especially if the water were not absolutely clean. Every leaf of Salvinia is, to begin with, excavated by a double layer of air-spaces, which lodge so much air as to give it great buoyancy. On the upper surface are placed at regular distances a number of prominences, each surmounted by a group of about four stiff, spreading hairs, which keep the water from reaching the surface of the leaf. When forcibly depressed, the Salvinia takes down with it a layer of air, which forms a flat bubble over the leaf, and of course gives great power of self-righting, for the specific gravity of the upper

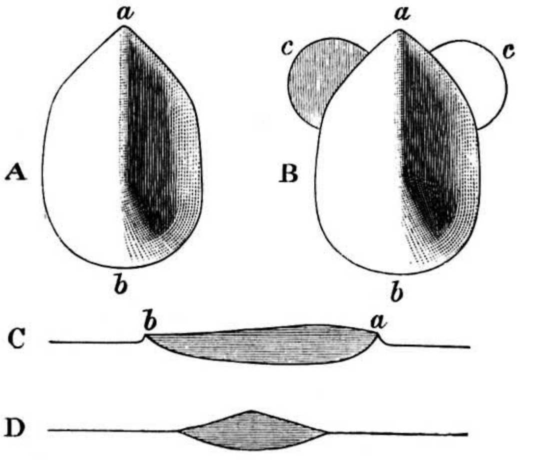

Fig. 1.—Duckweed (*Lemna minor*), magnified. A, single frond; *a*, scar of attachment to parent. A ridge extends from *a* to *b* across the upper surface of the frond, gently subsiding towards *b*. B, frond, budding-out two new fronds. C, longitudinal section from *a* to *b* (A), showing ascending capillary curves at *a* and *b*. D, transverse section, at right angles to the last. The margins of the frond in this plane are level with the surface of the water. N.B. The form of the fronds is somewhat variable. Minor inequalities occur along the margin, but the principal ascending curves, which are also centres of attraction, are at *a*, *b*, and *c*.

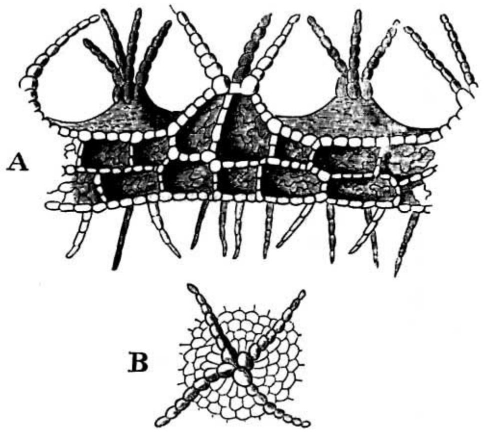

Fig. 2.—*Salvinia natans.* A, combined surface-view and section of floating leaf, modified from a figure in Sachs's "Botany," showing the air-cavities, the submerged hairs of the lower surface, and the groups of stiff hairs on the upper surface. These latter inclose spaces into which water cannot enter, even when the leaf is completely submerged. B, one group of hairs from the upper surface, seen from above.

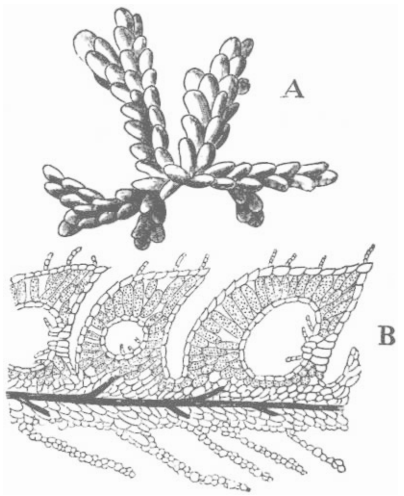

Fig. 3.—*Azolla caroliniana.* A, stem with leaves, magnified; B, longitudinal section through part of ditto, highly magnified. The air-cavities of the leaves are shown, the narrow spaces between the leaves, into which water cannot enter, the fine hairs of the upper surface, the submerged leaf-lobes, and the vascular bundles.

side is greatly reduced, while the lower side is weighted, as before, by the long, water-logged roots. Once restored to the surface, the bubble bursts, and the little drops into which it is instantly resolved roll off like drops of quicksilver. Azolla, which is found in most hot countries, and is often grown in hothouses, behaves in a very similar way. Here the leaves are far smaller, and crowded together upon a branching stem of minute size. There are a few hairs upon the upper surface, and between the leaves are narrow clefts, connected with globular cavities, which occupy the centre of every leaf. These cavities, which are often closed, and never possess more than an outlet of extreme minuteness, are always filled with air; so are the clefts between the leaves. No water can lodge on the upper surface, apparently because the surface-film is stretched from the raised edge of one leaf to that of the next; and thus buoyancy, self-righting, and repulsion of water are efficiently secured.

Many plants which ordinarily float on the surface of the water (Salvinia, Azolla, Duckweed, *Potamogeton natans*, &c.) sink on the approach of winter. At this time it is very curious to see how completely they lose both their buoyancy and their power of repelling water. I do not know how this change is brought about, but the result is one of obvious advantage. The leaves, or in some cases the entire plants, sink to the bottom, and hibernate there, out of the reach of frost. Many perish; some are broken up by decay into isolated buds. When spring returns, the few survivors float up, and soon cover the surface with leaves. It would be interesting to know something of the mechanism by which these seasonal changes are effected.

One of the commonest objects in Nature, which is apt to escape our notice on account of its minute size, for it is less than one-quarter of an inch in length, is the egg-raft of the gnat. This was beautifully described 150 years ago by Réaumur. The eggs of the gnat are cigar-shaped, and 250 or 300 of them are glued together, so as to make a little concave float, shaped like a shallow boat. The upper end of each egg is pointed; the lower end is provided with a lid, through which the larva will ultimately issue into the water. The gnat in all stages, even while still in the egg, requires an ample supply of air. It is therefore necessary that the egg-raft should float at the surface; it is also necessary that it should always float in the same position, so as to facilitate the escape of the larva. This is effectually secured by a provision of almost amusing simplicity. Let us first notice how efficient it is. If we take two or three of these tiny egg rafts, and place them in a jug of water, we may pour the water into a basin again and again; every time the egg-rafts float instantly to the surface; and the moment they come to the top, they are seen to be as dry as at first. The fact is that the surface-film cannot penetrate the fine spaces between the pointed ends of the eggs. The cavity of the egg-raft is thus overspread by an air-bubble, which breaks the instant it comes to the top. The larva of the gnat, when it escapes from the egg, floats at the surface, and it is enabled to do so in consequence of the properties of the surface-film. When the larva changes to a pupa it becomes buoyant, and floats at the surface, except when alarmed. To enable it to free itself without unnecessary effort from the surface of the water, the respiratory tubes of the pupa are furnished with a valvular apparatus, which can cut the connection with the air in a moment, and restore it at pleasure, when the pupa again floats to the surface.[1]

Another Dipterous insect, whose larva inhabits rapid streams, makes an ingenious use of the properties of the surface-film. This is the larva of Simulium, of which I have given some account in the lecture just quoted. At the time of the delivery of that lecture, I was wholly unable to explain how one difficulty in the life of the insect is surmounted. The larva clings to the water-weeds found in brisk and lively streams. The pupal stage is passed in the same situation. But a time comes when the fly has to emerge. Now the fly is a delicate and minute insect, with gauzy wings. How does it escape from the rushing water into the air above, where the remainder of its life has to be passed? This was a question upon which I had spent much thought, but in vain. It appeared to me for many months completely insoluble. However, I was informed last year by Baron Osten Sacken of a paper written by Verdat, seventy years ago, in which the emergence of the fly of Simulium is described. Guided by Verdat's description, I had little difficulty in seeing for myself how the difficulty is actually overcome. During the latter part of the pupal stage, the pupa-case becomes inflated with air, which is extracted from the water, and passed through the spiracles of the fly into the space immediately within the pupal skin. The pupal skin thus becomes distended with air, and assumes a more rounded shape in consequence. At length it splits along the back, in the way usual among insects, and there emerges a small bubble of air, which rises quickly to the surface of the water and there bursts. When the bubble bursts, out comes the fly. It spreads its hairy legs, and runs upon the surface of the water to find some solid support up which it can climb. As soon as its wings are dry, it flies to the trees or bushes overhanging the stream.

A very interesting inhabitant of the waters, which makes use of the properties of the surface-film to construct for itself a home beneath the surface, is the water-spider (*Argyroneta aquatica*). This interesting little animal has been described by many naturalists, some of whom, judging from their accounts, had no personal acquaintance with its habits. But among the number is the eminent naturalist Félix Plateau, son of the physicist to whom we are so much indebted for our knowledge of the phenomena of surface-tension. I need hardly say that in his account of the water spider, Prof. Plateau gives a full and adequate account of the scientific principles concerned in the formation of its crystalline home.[1] Plateau remarks that the water-spider, like most other spiders, is an air-breathing animal. It dives below the surface, and spends nearly its whole life submerged. In order to do this without interruption to its breathing, the spider carries down a bubble of air, which overspreads the whole abdomen as well as the under side of the thorax. These parts of the body are covered with branched hairs, so fine and close that the surface-film of water cannot pass between them. The spider swims on its back, and the air lodges in the neighbourhood of the respiratory openings, which are placed on that surface which floats uppermost. When the spider comes to the top, as it does from time to time to renew its supply of air, it pushes the abdomen out of the water, and we can then see that this part of the body is completely dry. When it sinks, the water closes in again at a little distance from the body, and the bubble forms once more.

It would be inconvenient to the water-spider to be obliged to come frequently to the surface for the purpose of breathing. A predatory animal on the watch for its victims must lie in ambush close to the spot where they are expected to appear, and the water-spider accordingly requires a lurking-place filled with air, beneath the surface of the water. It has its own way of supplying this want. Relying on the fact, already illustrated by our muslin bag, that the surface-film of water will not readily pass through small openings, the spider proceeds as follows. It begins by drawing together some water-weeds with a few threads, in such a way that they meet at one or more points. It then fetches from the surface a fresh supply of air, and squeezes part of it out by pressing together the bases of its last pair of legs. The bubble rises, but is detained by some of the threads previously spun across its path. Then the spider returns to the surface to fetch another bubble, and repeats the operation as often as is necessary. Now and then she secures the growing bubble by additional threads, and before long has a bubble nearly as big as a walnut, inclosed within an invisible silken net, which imprisons the air as effectually as a dome of glass would do. The spider takes care to conceal her home from observation, and before long the minute Algæ, growing all the more vigorously because of the air brought to them, effectually conceal the habitation. The mouth of the dome, which is of course beneath, is narrowed to a small circle, and Plateau has observed a cylindrical horizontal tube, seven to eight millimetres in diameter, by which the spider is enabled to enter or leave her home without being observed. The air within is renewed as required, by the visits of the spider to the surface.

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[1] The larva and pupa of the gnat are more fully described in my British Association lecture on "Some Difficulties in the Life of Aquatic Insects," reported in NATURE, vol. xliv. p. 457.

[1] "Observations sur l'Argyronète aquatique," *Bull. Acad. Roy. de Belgique*, 2me. sér., tom. xxiii., 1867.

Besides this home, which is the ordinary lurking-place of the spider, another is required at the time when the young are hatched. The new-born spiders are devoid of the velvety covering of hairs, and would drown in a moment if placed in a nursery with a watery floor. The female spider therefore makes a special nest for this particular occasion, which floats on the surface of the water, rising well above it. It is bell-shaped and strongly constructed. The upper part is partitioned off, and contains the eggs. Beneath the floor of the nursery the mother takes her station, and watches over the safety of her brood, defending them against the predatory insects which abound in fresh waters. It is interesting to see how the faculty of spinning silk, used by the house-spider for her snares, and at other times for the fluffy cocoon in which the eggs are enveloped, furnishes to the water-spider the materials of her architecture. It is not less interesting to observe the economy of material which results from the use of the tenacious and contractile surface-film, in place of a solid wall.

We will next consider another property of the surface-film, which is turned to account in the daily life of the very commonest of our floating plants, I mean the duckweed, which overspreads every pond and ditch. A number of the green floating leaves of duckweed are now placed in a shallow dish in the field of the lantern, and I will ask you to observe how they are grouped. They have spontaneously arranged themselves in a very irregular fashion, forming strings and chains which spread hither and thither over the surface of the water. This is not the way in which most floating bodies behave. Let us remove the duckweed, and replace it by another dish of water in which I will put a number of small disks of cork.[1] You will see that the bits of cork are attracted one to another and crowd together in one place. Let us inquire why the floating bits of cork are thus attracted towards one another. If any solid capable of being wetted by water is partly immersed in water, the liquid rises round it in an ascending capillary curve. If the solid is not wetted by water, the curve will turn downwards. We may get ascending or descending capillary curves in other ways. If, for instance, I were to lay a sheet of paper upon water, and turn its edges up at certain places, we should get marked ascending curves at these points. The raising of some parts of the surface causes other parts to sink, and may bring about descending curves, or make previously formed descending curves more marked. We shall find it helpful in our experiments to notice one very simple plan of producing a descending capillary curve round the edge of a vessel. If we take a glass of water, and fill it until the water is level with the brim, we naturally speak of the glass as *full;* but if we are careful to avoid rude shaking, we may still add a considerable quantity of water without spilling any. The glass will then become what we may call *over-full*, and its surface will be bounded by a descending capillary curve. Now, it is of immediate importance to us to observe that *like* capillary curves, whether ascending or descending, attract one another, and that *unlike* curves repel one another. The theoretical explanation of this point is not difficult, but it must not detain us here. To place the fact itself beyond dispute, we will try a little experiment. A circular dish of water is now placed in the field of the lantern, and we will introduce into it a small disk of wood. Both the disk and the side of the vessel are wetted by water, and an ascending capillary curve rises round each. The result is that the two bodies attract one another. Every time the disk is moved away it is powerfully drawn towards the side of the vessel. With a little syringe we will add water to the dish in sufficient quantity to raise the level above the edge of the vessel. You will observe that the wooden disk is now repelled by the edge of the vessel, and floats free in the centre. By sucking up a little water, it becomes attracted once more, and so we may go on, causing it to be attracted or repelled, according as we add or subtract a small quantity of water. But what has all this to do with the duckweed? In order to explain the behaviour of duckweed, I must ask you to examine a careful representation of its form. This common plant has not, to my knowledge, been faithfully represented in any botanical book. You will see that the leaf is of an irregular oval shape, broader at one end than at the other, and that the narrow end is pointed. A raised ridge extends along the length of the leaf, from the point to the middle of the opposite or rounded border. Duckweed almost invariably propagates itself by budding. New leaves are pushed out symmetrically on each side of the point. They grow bigger and bigger, and gradually free themselves. The point upon each leaf marks the place where it was last attached to the parent leaf. Sometimes the budding is so rapid, that, before a fresh pair of leaves have become free, they have already budded out a second pair, which we may call the granddaughters of the parent leaf. The pointed end of the leaf, and also the opposite end of the ridge, are raised above the general level, and very marked capillary curves ascend from the general water-level to these points. The free edge of every bud is also raised above the general water-level, and a capillary curve ascends to meet it. Hence, when a number of leaves of duckweed are floating freely on water, they are powerfully attracted one to another at certain points, while at intervening points they are relatively inert. If you take a floating leaf of duckweed, and bring near it a clean needle or a pencil-point, or any similar object, provided that it is not greasy, you will see that the leaf is at once attracted towards the point, but it always turns itself so as to bring one of its ascending curves round to the needle or pencil. We all see in the lantern how readily a leaf of duckweed is made to rotate rapidly by causing a needle-point to revolve round it, without ever touching it. Let us now try to imitate the behaviour of the leaves by some rude models. I have here some elliptical paper floats, cut out with a pair of scissors, and having each of the pointed ends a little turned up. We place these one by one on the surface of the water, and you see in the lantern how they are attracted to one another, point to point, and how they form long chains, which have a tendency to break up into stars. It is the existence of such points of attraction on the margin of the leaves which causes the duckweed to form chains and strings, so long as there is any unoccupied surface in the pond. A moment's consideration shows how profitable this tendency is to the plant. Were the duckweed to crowd together like the floating bits of cork, the pressure towards the centre of any considerable mass of plants would be so great that the new leaves budded out would find no room in which to expand; but, by virtue of one very simple provision, viz. the existence of inequalities of level along the edges of the leaves, clear spaces and lanes are left between the floating leaves, so long as any unoccupied space remains.

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[1] In order to avoid the inconvenience caused by the attraction of the sides of the vessel, the dish should be over-full of water.

Long exposure to the air, especially in still weather, affects the life of duckweed in a material way. Dust and decaying organic substances give rise to a pellicle, which is most mischievous to floating plants; and I think I could show, if time allowed, how much the habits of duckweed have been altered thereby. But, apart from visible impurities, mere exposure to air gives, as Lord Rayleigh has taught us, a considerable degree of superficial viscosity to water. Hence, the leaves of duckweed, when the surface is contaminated, will tend to lie in whatever positions they may be thrown by accidental causes, such as wind, and the attractions due to capillarity will be more or less impeded. But the effect of the superficial viscosity will in time be overcome by the attractive forces, so that it probably does not in the long run greatly affect the distribution of the leaves over the surface of water.

Many other floating plants, but not all, behave more or less like duckweed, and for the same reason. As yet I know of none which space themselves quite so effectually, and the extreme abundance of the common duckweed, as well as its world-wide distribution, may be partly due to the completeness of its adaptation to capillary forces. Some dead objects may accidentally take a shape which causes them to spread out over water, but I have met with none which have particularly struck me. Floating natural objects, such as sticks or seeds, behave, in many cases at least, very differently, and become densely massed. My attention was first called to this subject by seeing how different was the grouping of duckweed from that of some seeds of *Potamogeton natans*, which were floating in the same pond.

The capillary forces which spread the leaves of duckweed or Azolla upon the surface of water are indirectly concerned in the transport of these and like plants to fresh sites. If we put a stick into water overspread with duckweed, we cannot fail to notice how the leaves cling to the stick. They cling in a particular way, which enables them to bear transport more safely. The wetted surface, for obvious physical reasons, is attracted to the wetted stick; and the water-repellent surface, which is that which best resists drying, is outwards. The tenacity with which duckweed clings to the legs of water-birds, and the position which it almost inevitably takes under such circumstances, may have a good deal to do with the safe transport of the plant to distant pools. It is not, I think, too much to say that the prosperity of duckweed depends very largely upon the capillary forces which come into play at the surface of water.

We have now exhausted our time, though I have been obliged to leave unnoticed many special adaptations of living things to the peculiar conditions which obtain on the surface of water. Had time allowed, I should have been glad to say something about the aquatic animals which creep on the surface-film as on a ceiling, and about the insects which run and even leap upon the surface-film without wetting their minute and hairy bodies.[1] All small animals and plants which float on water necessarily come into contact with the surface-film, and have to deal with the difficulties which result from it. We have seen that they generally manage in the long run to convert these natural difficulties into positive advantages.

I have to thank my colleague, Dr. Stroud, for his frequent explanations of the physical principles upon which these adaptations depend, and also for much practical and valuable help in the preparation of suitable experiments.

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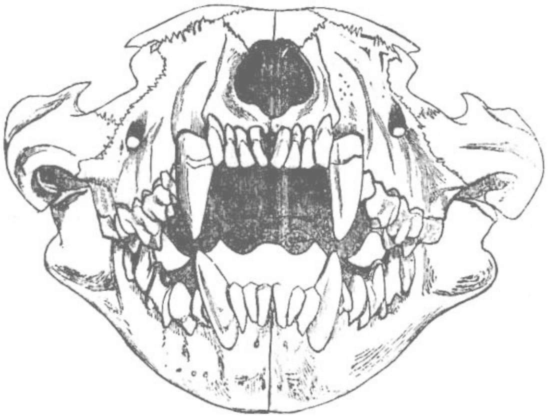
[1] See NATURE, vol. xliv. p. 457.

THE DISCOVERY OF AUSTRALIAN-LIKE MAMMALS IN SOUTH AMERICA.

THE year 1891 proved a notable one in regard to marsupials. The existing mole-like marsupial (*Notoryctes*) from the deserts of Central Australia having been made known to us, news came of the discovery in the Tertiaries of Patagonia of remains of carnivorous marsupials closely allied to the existing pouched wolf, or Thylacine, of Tasmania. This discovery was immediately recognized as one likely to considerably modify some of our views regarding the distribution of mammals. A preliminary account of these new marsupials was given by Dr. Florentino Ameghino in a paper written for the new serial, *Revist. Argent. Hist. Nat.* This description seems to leave no doubt as to the correctness of the diagnosis of the fossil remains.

Before going further, it may be well to remind our readers that, with the single exception of the opossums (*Didelphyidæ*) of America, all marsupials are now exclusively Australasian. The carnivorous types, such as the Thylacine (*Thylacinus*) and the Tasmanian Devil (*Sarcophilus*), are distinguished from all living mammals in that their upper cutting-teeth (incisors) are either four or five in number on either side, while in the lower jaw there are invariably three. This relation is shown in the figure of the skull of the Tasmanian Devil—a near ally of the Thylacine—where, between the large tusks of the upper jaw, we see the four pairs of incisors opposed to only three pairs in the lower jaw. In ordinary mammals, on the other hand, the number of pairs of incisors in each jaw does not exceed three, the number of those in the two jaws being usually equal. A further peculiarity of marsupials is that the cheek or grinding teeth comprise four true molars and not more than three premolars; whereas in ordinary mammals the typical number is three molars and four premolars, there being no known instance of the presence of four true molars except in some individuals of the fox-like *Otocyon*. Another peculiarity of most marsupials is the distinct inflection of the lower posterior extremity, or "angle," of the lower jaw, while very frequently the bony palate of the skull has unossified spaces.


Front view of the skull of the Tasmanian Devil. (After Flower.)

The new forms described by Dr. Ameghino were obtained from the lower part of that great series of freshwater formations with which so large an area of South America is covered. It has been inferred that the Patagonian deposits in question are as old as the Lower Eocene of Europe; but, although they are undoubtedly of considerable age, this inference can scarcely be regarded as an established